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# AFFAIRS OF THE WORLD

BY WILLIS FLETCHER JOHNSON

“UNLESS the Russian note of May 11 is withdrawn, what can be accomplished at The Hague?” The question was asked in the interim between Genoa and The Hague, by the Hon. David Jayne Hill, writing in this REVIEW about the illusions of the Genoa Conference. It was perhaps less an inquiry than a prophecy, and as such it has been fulfilled. The Russian note was not withdrawn, and nothing was accomplished at The Hague. Dr. Hill will not regard me as belittling his prescience if I say that this was one of many cases in which a prophecy is merely one man’s courageous utterance of something which others know but fear to say. It would be an intolerable reflection upon the intelligence and judgment of the world to suggest that it had not yet learned the truth set forth—also in a question—by the herdsman of Tekoa nearly thirty centuries ago: “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” The one entirely essential basis of agreement was lacking at The Hague, as it had been at Genoa. But I have not quoted Dr. Hill fully. He demanded to know, in case the Russians refused to conform with the Powers on what is perhaps the supreme moral and legal point in international negotiations, what could be accomplished at The Hague “or anywhere else”. Comrade Tchitcherin supplied the answer: Nothing, anywhere! It ought not to require further demonstrations to convince even the most optimistic of that fact. It is of course regrettable; chiefly on altruistic grounds, for the sake of the Russian people. As for the rest of the world, it is not for one moment to be conceded that its rehabilitation is dependent upon restored fellowship with Russia. Perhaps such relations would facilitate and expedite the return of normal conditions. But the world would be paying “too much for its whistle”. Far better to endure the delay and the continued burdens which Russian estrangement may entail, than to compromise the character of the world by accepting “the easiest way”.

Out of evil comes at least a little good. The fiasco of The Hague reënforces that of Genoa in vindicating the wisdom and the righteousness of the American policy not only of the last year in declining to take part in these futile conferences but also in the last century in consistently holding aloof from the tortuous mazes of European politics. It is an interesting and suggestive coincidence that the conference at The Hague occurred almost exactly at the centenary—next month—of the notorious Congress of Verona. The latter was the culmination and end of that series of conclaves of the Holy Alliance which determined the United States to crystallize the primal policy of Washington into the Monroe Doctrine; and the meeting at The Hague was the latest—probably the last—of a series which has given every thoughtful American cause for profound gratitude for the wisdom of a hundred years ago and for the resolute loyalty to that wisdom which prevails today.

An inspiring contrast to the meddlings and muddlings in Europe is presented in the splendid achievement of our Government in securing a potential settlement of the forty-year controversy between Peru and Chile over the Tacna-Arica territory. Indeed, with the signing of the protocol by those two Powers the settlement may be regarded as assured. We cannot doubt either that the President of the United States will prudently and equitably discharge his great duty as arbitrator or that both the litigants will loyally accept his decision. The achievement is wholly admirable from every point of view; notably from three: It is well to have the dispute decided by arbitration, a method exactly adapted to it; it is well to have those American Republics thus seek a purely American disposition of their differences, instead of turning to the "Big Five" of the League of Nations, though of that latter body they are both nominally members; and it is well to have them accept the United States as umpire between them, not because this country desires or aspires to anything like a hegemony of this hemisphere, but because such a transaction will perceptibly strengthen the bonds of confidence, sympathy and friendship between us and our southern neighbors. Because of this fine achievement, the American Secretary of State will be welcomed with peculiar fervor when he presently visits the

Brazilian Centenary Exposition. Meanwhile it is scarcely probable that the League of Nations will undertake to discipline or even to reprove Chile and Peru for ignoring its authority and offices in the matter,—though technically they might have been expected to turn to it instead of to the one great Power which has held aloof from it,—seeing how haltingly and ineffectually the League, even in its secret meetings, is getting along with the Balkan and other problems with which it has attempted to deal.

One of the most instructive incidents of the extensive railroad strike has been the definition of the right to strike which was made by a leading Socialist organ, *The New York Call*. President Harding in his proclamation recognized frankly the right of men to cease working, and insisted upon the equal right of other men to work; and declared the disposition of the Government to be to protect both categories in those rights. Against this *The Call* protested, declaring that the President thus aligned himself against the strikers. The strikers, it held, should be protected in their right to strike. But to protect others in going to work in place of the strikers was to deny the right of the strikers, since the right to strike necessarily implied the right to make the strike effective by whatever means might be necessary. In other words, strikers must be free, not merely to quit work themselves but also to prevent other men from taking their places and to prevent the railroads from conducting their business without them. They have a right to “make their strike effective”, even if it be necessary to resort to violence, sabotage, arson or murder. The significant fact is not that a Socialist organ enunciates that detestable and intolerable doctrine, but that Mr. Gompers’s American Federation of Labor seems to acquiesce in it. Although, as a rule, Mr. Gompers is antipathetic toward Socialism, *The Call* is at present his chief journalistic champion, and if he and the Federation dissent from such extreme utterances as that which I have cited and repudiate the making of them, the fact is not known to the public. It was pleasant last month to applaud Mr. Gompers’s manly and successful stand against Bolshevik Communism. It is regrettable that he does not similarly stand against the equally abominable principles of his Socialist advocates.

Discussion of national anthems is again rife, somewhat more extensively, earnestly and persistently than ever before; taking chiefly the tone of unfavorable criticism of both the words and music of *The Star Spangled Banner*. It is to be hoped that the time will never come when Americans will not love that historic poem and be thrilled at sound of its stirring air. Indeed, it is to be wished that more than one in a hundred of them would love it enough to learn its words. Yet it might be even finer than it is in both words and music without being well suited to the purposes of an official national anthem. The indisputable objections to the words are two: That it is a "poem of occasion", based upon a single specific incident not of the first importance, and therefore unsuited for permanent use; and that its spirit is almost entirely martial, not to say belligerent, and therefore unsuited to the peaceful uses of a peace-loving nation. The objections to the music are that it is of foreign origin, that its earliest association was with an obscene drinking song, and that it is difficult to sing. Not one nor all of these five objections can ever banish the song from the hymnary of patriotism, but they may well impeach its claim to supreme distinction and official adoption. I cannot recall that any air has ever been adopted as a national anthem which was not composed for that purpose or at least for patriotic use; nor that, with a single obvious exception, any was ever thus adopted that was of alien origin. The one exception to the latter rule is, of course, that air which Beethoven, Haydn, Weber and other great musicians regarded as one of the noblest compositions of human genius and which beside being the *God Save the King!* of England has been the official and favorite national air of at least half a dozen other important countries. It might, to the uninitiated, seem passing strange that it should be opposed on account of its foreign and especially its English origin by the very persons who are most zealously in favor of *The Star Spangled Banner*; and it is of curious interest to recall that Samuel F. Smith, when he "shouted a song for the brave and the free", supposed that he was fitting it to the notes of a German folk ballad! It is not clear that there is any imperative necessity of our officially adopting a national anthem, but if we should do so, we should make sure that in all respects it is appropriate

and worthy. As to the argument that national anthems are, as poets, "born, not made," it must be remembered that at least two of the best that ever were written were in fact "written to order".

There has been a revival of prosecutions of publishers for issuing reputedly "obscene" literature, with varying results. Amid a flood of injudicious babble, *pro* and *contra*, two facts stand forth conspicuous. One is, that it is disgraceful and should be intolerable to have the terrorism of censorship held over the literary world by self-appointed meddlers who are usually conspicuous for ignorance and absurdity of judgment, but who, under one of the amazing anomalies of our governmental system, are invested with a quasi-official and peculiarly arbitrary power. The other is that there are now being written and printed entirely too many books impossible of justification on grounds not of morality but of common decency. Prudery is generally prurience, and is detestable; but equally detestable is filth written for filth's sake, even though it be spuriously labelled "art". "Clear your mind of cant," exhorted Ursa Major; and the urging is as pertinent today as it was a century and a half ago. We all know that there are many books in which sexual intimacies and aberrations are portrayed and discussed with clinical frankness, yet which have no unclean purpose and which it is simply ridiculous to ban as "obscene"; some of them, such as the masterpieces of Hawthorne and Daudet, being imbued with the noblest of moral inspirations, and others, from Petronius to Maupassant, being written faithfully to depict and record the manners of the times. We know, too, just as well, that there are books being printed now—as in years past—with no such purpose or excuse for being, but solely for their appeal to lubricity. To discriminate between the two classes, and to protect the one in the freedom of letters while suppressing the other as a public nuisance, must be recognized as one of the most difficult and important of tasks, which it would be scandalous to entrust to an irresponsible and arbitrary 'prentice hand, yet which needs to be performed for the sake of literature and art as well as of social and personal morals.

While New York and other communities are agitated over conflicting schemes for war memorials which differ chiefly in degrees of fantasticality and bad taste, "they order this matter better in France." In the Forest of Compiègne, on the spot where the Armistice was signed, is being placed a simple slab of stone, bearing this inscription:

Here, on the 11th November, 1918, Succumbed the Criminal Pride of the German Empire, Beaten by the Free Peoples Whom It Desired to Enslave.

That is all; but it is enough, and not too much. There is not a thought nor a suggestion in it that is not unimpeachably true, or that is lacking in perfect tact and taste. It is a model worthy of study and emulation by everyone who commemorates or in any way writes of or speaks of the Great War; for it is a transcript of the legend indelibly inscribed in the minds and hearts of the civilized world.

It is not easy to restrain a certain impulse toward at least a semi-cynical amusement at the performance of the young man who at first entirely rejected his father's legacy of a million dollars, on the Socialist ground that the possession of such a fortune, and certainly its transmission to him who had had no part in creating it, could not be justified on moral grounds; and that anyway it would be a burden to him to take care of it. After a period of heart-searching and meditation he appears to have decided to keep a considerable part of it, but to give the bulk of it to a radical and Socialist organization, "for Public Service"; which organization is not expected to demur at the acceptance of "tainted money". With all possible recognition of the altruistic nobility of the young man, there persists in coming to mind the old story of the young woman who "got religion" so strenuously that she felt that the costly jewels she was wearing were devices of the Evil One to drag her down to hell, and accordingly gave them all to her sister.